

**SB 372 – Create Wolf Hunting License and Wolf/Grizzly Supertag Auction**

(Sen. Joe Balyeat)

This bill creates the framework for wolf hunting licenses. It also sets up the mechanics for a wolf supertag auction or a grizzly supertag auction once either of those species is de-listed from the endangered species list. None of these actions would have immediate effect - they would only set things up for FWP to act immediately once delisting occurs.

I don't think I have to persuade anybody on this committee about the fact that time is of the essence with respect to wolf de-listing. Wolves are multiplying rapidly in MT, and ravaging the storehouse of elk and deer which sportsmen paid for over the last century with hard-earned tax dollars. Five years ago I was on the forefront of the fight for wolf de-listing. At the time, I was Vice-Chair of House FWP with Dan Fuchs chair.

We surveyed elk herds – found a decimated calf-cow ratio. There was denial, but eventually we were proved correct. We exposed and investigated the federal coverup. There was again denial; but we were again proved correct. We predicted the rapid multiplication of wolf numbers. There was again denial, and again we proved correct. WE predicted that within 5 years, there would instances of people killed by wolves. There was again denial, but.. unfortunately... last year we were again proved correct.

So far, we've been right every step of the way. Its good to finally have the FWP finally on our side on this one – and they'll testify in favor of this bill, in fact I had it drafted at their request. We're not alone sounding the alarm anymore. All the experts agree, we need to get this done as soon as possible. Unfortunately, this bill will do little to speed up the de-listing process; except that it will be added evidence that MT has a wolf management plan in place, and is ready to take over wolf management at the earliest possible moment. Perhaps that's why Idaho is also in the process right now of establishing a wolf hunting license, and I have a copy of their bill draft if anyone would like to see it.

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, time is of the essence so much, that I'll shut up so we can listen to proponents and opponents, and then perhaps take action on this bill at the earliest possible moment. Thank you.

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Saturday, January

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Staff writer

January 26, 2007

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That's how much the Fish and Game Commission decided a resident wolf tag should cost once wolves are off the endangered species list and can be hunted in the state. A few steps remain before that could happen, but a Fish and Game spokesman said Thursday that hunts could begin later this year.

It would be embarrassing if we weren't ready, Niels Nokkentved said.

The Fish and Game Commission also decided Thursday to set aside 10 wolf tags that the commission could donate to such things as fundraising auctions. Idaho bighorn sheep tags go for tens of thousands of dollars every year at Foundation for North American Wild Sheep conventions. "What they're going to do with the wolf tags they haven't decided yet, but they have the authority to do something," Nokkentved said.

In order to buy a wolf tag, an Idaho hunter would need a hunting license, which costs \$12.75. For nonresidents, the hunting license is \$141.50 and the wolf tag would cost \$256.

The tag prices that commissioners set will be the same as mountain lion or black bear tags.

Suzanne Stone, Northern Rockies representative for the environmental group Defenders of Wildlife, said, "I guess the biggest concern we had is the auctioned tags: That seemed a little perverse."

Stone's organization opposes hunting of wolves and is concerned that Idaho will authorize shooting of most of its wolves – a move Gov. Butch Otter endorsed two weeks ago. Commissioners tossed around the idea of calling the 10 special tags "governor's tags."

Otter, addressing a sportsmen's rally on the steps of the state Capitol on Jan. 11, said, "I'm prepared to bid for the first ticket to shoot a wolf myself," and went on to call for public hunting of all but about 100 of Idaho's estimated 650 wolves.

No decisions have been made as far as numbers of animals to be hunted or whether the state would have controlled hunts or open seasons. All that would go through a process including focus groups, a draft plan and public comment over the summer. "They anticipate, if everything goes right, to be completed by November, for ultimate commission approval at their November meeting," Nokkentved said.

Stone said a Fish and Game official initially told her the 10 tags would be the subject of a "bidding war" between wolf supporters and wolf opponents.

"I think that's a really bad idea," she said. "That's not a normal management practice for wildlife."

Nokkentved said that wasn't part of the plan Fish and Game commissioners approved Thursday. In addition to setting the tag fees and setting aside the 10 special tags, the commissioners voted unanimously to ask lawmakers to amend various Idaho statutes to make wolf hunting legal once the animal is removed from the endangered list. Nokkentved said that mainly consists of adding the word "wolf" to several sections of Idaho law.

Idaho has never before had a hunting season on wolves. "Apparently they were wiped out before there was a Fish and Game," Nokkentved said.

In 1995, 35 wolves were reintroduced to Idaho as part of a recovery program. There are now an estimated 650 wolves in the state in 71 packs, and more than 41 breeding pairs.

Tom Buckley, spokesman for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Spokane, said Idaho is required to maintain a minimum of 10 wolves including 10 breeding pairs, and the state's management plan prescribes a "buffer" to bring that up to 15 breeding pairs minimum.

"The state of Idaho has an approved wolf management plan, and the number of wolves in the state have far exceeded what we asked them to maintain for their recovery goals," Buckley said. "Once they've got the control and the wolves are off the endangered species list, it's really up to them to manage them, and it sounds like they're going to manage them like they would any other large predator, cougar or bear – allow a hunting season."

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